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AUTHOR	Betz, Robert
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Abstract

The role proposed for the consultant is one of creating need and demonstrating that educational progress can be made by systematic and well managed approaches. The extent to which the project consultant is able to establish the same basic helping relationship with project staff members as he desires the staff to have with the clientele, will determine the degree of success of the project. Today the consultant is more of an expert on the process of change, of modifying attitudes and assisting in effective behavioral changes, than an expert on content. Information regarding content can be achieved by more effective means; textbooks, programmed instruction, and audio-visual media. If the consultant relegates his role to information dispensing, he will miss his opportunity to perform his unique function. (KJ)

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THE PROJECT CONSULTANT: HIS UNIQUE ROLE

By Robert Betz, Ph. D.
Associate Professor
Western Michigan University at Kalamazoo

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Introduction

Project H. E. L. P. is one of many Federal and/or State funded special programs designed to improve the total educational fabric of the nation. One of the reasons for the development of such programs is the hope that they will be experimental and innovative, and thus, will provide direction for future educational planning. In addition, such projects and programs have typically directed their efforts to assisting special groups such as underachievers, pctential dropouts, the academically gifted, the culturally disadvantaged, etc. Such is the case with Project H. E. L. P.

Project H. E. L. P. concentrates its efforts on those students identified as alienated from the regular on-going school program. Characteristics of these students include: High absenteeism from school and classes, poor academic performance, low motivation, poor attitude toward learning, etc. Such groups have been referred to in the literature as the "trolls", sitting dropouts, the "greasers;" school push outs, rejects and other names basically used to describe a person alienated from his basic reference group-- his peers and their successes. Lincoln Park, Michigan, a bedroom-community suburb, of Detroit discovered through school-community studies ". . . conditions detrimental to maximum

utilization of human resources." These conditions included a 12.5% dropout rate, one-third of the students functioning below their ability level, a high index of unemployment, a low per-pupil expenditure on education and an average educational level of residents of only 10.5 years. Thus, from an analysis of these conditions and a sincere desire to assist students who were victims of these conditions, Project H. E. L. P. Education for Lincoln Park (H. E. L. P.) was conceived.

Actually, the Project design is a simple one. Given the premise that the alienated has "lost contact" with the school, its program and its potentiality for success, why not try and re-establish that contact? Furthermore, it is not the responsibility of the school to do so, it's the responsibility of the total school milieu. Therefore, thirty teachers were given first TIME, second SPECIAL TRAINING and third STUDENTS who were identified as alienated. It was then the teachers responsibility to profit from his own human resources and the special training, use the time assigned and establish a helping individualized relationship with five to ten students assigned to him.

The Problem for Study

In most Federal or State funded projects such as H. E. L. P., consultants are typically used. They are usually selected for their experience, training and "degree of expertize" in a prescribed area. Project H. E. L. P. was no exception to this generalization. The program director and his planning staff employed consultants who could be of assistance in the

planning, training, execution and evaluative phases of the project.

The inclusion of consultants in programs like H. E. L. P. invariably leads to a variety of problems. The most prominant of the problems is often the discrepancy in perceived roles (by the consultants) and the roles assigned to them by the professional staff of the project. In most cases the preconceived roles assigned to the consultant are from either: (1) previous experience the staff member has had with a consultant or (2) his cognitive idea of what the consultant should be.

In addition, others connected with and involved in the project--the school board, the administrative staff, the counselors, the Director--perceive the role of the consultant differently dependent upon their expectations for the program. For example, the school principal where such programs are lodged may perceive the role of the consultant as a "trouble shooter" to keep the staff and the project's clients from upsetting the "normal" routine of the school too much or not at all.

The present paper examines the various role expectations of the consultant from a variety of viewpoints. However, emphasis is placed on the importance of two principle expectations--the consultant and the para-professional. A possible working model is also proposed for the consultant in his contacts with the para-professional especially during the training phases of such projects.

The Consultant and the Para-Professional

As with many words used in the field of education, precise definitions are well near impossible. Semantics constantly plagues us in our ability to communicate and understand. Deferring to the Winston Dictionary for a more clearly understood definition is not very helpful either:

> Consultant: "one who consults or is consulted; specifically, a physician who is called in for consultation or advise."

Thus, the term "consultant" is not definitive as to duties and is again borrowed from another speciality--medicine. It is more than likely, too, that because of its history of use in that speciality and the more scientific the emphasis, the meaning of the term is more clearly communicated.

"Para-professional" becomes even more difficult to define, but combining basic references from the Winston Dictionary can get us close to a more precise meaning.

> Para: ". . . . closely related to another."
>
> Profession(al): " . . . . a calling or vocation . . . especially one that requires learning and mental, rather than physical or manual labor."

The para-professional, then, in the lexicon of the present study is a professional educator (in this precise case, a secondary school teacher) who has a skill closely related to another professional the secondary school counselor. The skill is the ability to engage in meaningful one-to-one relationships with students who are alienated from the on-going program, and to use the one-to-one relationship in such a way as to assist the student to a more profitable use of the school and its curriculum.

Tersely, then, one of the basic roles of the consultant is to assist the project teacher to use his/her basic personality in a one-to-one relationship with an alienated youth so as to accomplish the objectives of the program. It is in this context that the perceptions of consultant and counsultee clash most frequently. The project teacher views the consultant as an "expert" who can provide techniques and methods useful to his/her success. And, the problem of success is quite important to the teacher for he/she has relinquished the traditional group instructional role for an individualized tutorial role. In many cases the change is very threatening and measures of success are few and far between because of the characteristics of the students. They traditionally don't have many successes and the successes they do have are rather limited--certainly they must be viewed as "baby steps" compared to the "giant steps" of more productive and now alienated youngsters. It is necessary to remember, too, that the educational experience of the para-professional has been in an area (teaching) which has many more tangible measures of success than the area of interpersonal relationships.

So success gets caught up with adequacy in a new role and the consultant is viewed as the person who can provide the direct suggestions to insure success. However, the consultant views his role in quite a different way. True he might possess skills, insights, techniques and methods which he has found to be successful for <u>him</u> in his work with the alienated, yet he

is also cognizant of the fact that techniques alone are not enough. In fact, the borrowing of techniques without internalization typically results in a phoniness easily perceived and easily penetrated. The consultant is more interested and perceives his role as assisting the teacher to discover what methods and techniques fit his particular basic personality structure, and in finding how these insights can be used to help others. Naturally, this process involves a great deal of self-insight on the part of the teacher, and a longer period of time to learn. Maneuvers, then, of the consultant to cause the teacher to discover more about self and how to use self in the relationship are met with frequent resistances. The teacher is faced with students and problems, feels responsible for solving them and needs to "prove" that he/she can be successful in a new role. If the consultant does not provide direct suggestion, answers to questions and techniques of assistance he may be viewed as holding out on the teacher who is in need of help.

In addition, many teachers find it difficult to "face themselves." It is difficult for them to examine what they are doing and how they are behaving in a relationship in order to discover ways to assist others. This perception is not at all internalized and, in fact, the judgment of failure is usually rendered in terms of what the student does and not what the teacher does!

A Possible Model for the Consultant

Given the previously mentioned clashing sets of perceptions and role expectations, how can the consultant operate and be most effective? If he focuses

continually on the self of the teacher, probes for self-analysis and demands by his behavior consistent self-purging he runs a high risk of alienating the teacher. If he focuses continually on techniques, the giving of direct advice and the development of controlling behavior, he runs a high risk of creating autonomons in his own image. Yet if he doesn't offer suggestions (when appropriate) or cause teachers to examine self (when appropriate) he runs the risk of losing the respect and confidence of those he is trying to help.

The trend of the discussion, and our experiences so far, has led to the conclusion that the consultant must develop the same kind of relationship with the teachers that he expects them to create with the students in the program. That is, he must behave with them the same way he desires them to behave with alienated youngsters.

Therefore, it is essential as a first step to define how teachers need to behave with alienated youth. Since the Project teachers already possessed a high skill level in teaching subject material, and in handling group instruction no definitions were sought in that area. The critical behavior, then, seemed to be that which was needed in the one-to-one relationship. In focusing on the one-to-one relationship, it was necessary to develop sufficient skills to cause the teacher to be successful in initiating and maintaining productive interpersonal relationships but because of time and objectives not to develop skills in personal counseling. Thus, the role of the para-professional in the project became more clearly defined. He was basically a teacher and used the medium of subject matter as his entree to

alienation, but he had additional training and help in initiating and maintaining close, one-to-one interpersonal relationships.

Three facts of this interpersonal relationship were deemed to be important. First, the para-professional must learn to listen to the verbal and non-verbal communications of the student. Listening requires the listener to not talk and to try and perceive the world as the talker does. Second, the listener must understand what the person is saying which requires him to keep his own value judgments out of the way of the communication. In this sense knowledge of his own values, attitudes and feelings are necessary if he is to know which are his and which are his students. Thirdly, he must be able to communicate back to the student his understanding of what he is saying. This skill demands openness, good ego strength and the willingness to run risks. To share personal understanding of another in a direct open confrontation--without anger or hostility--is essential to close interpersonal relationships get very difficult to achieve.

In essence, then, these are the basic ways in which the project consultants attempted to relate to the project teachers. They tried to listen and encourage the teacher to discuss successes, problems and failures in terms of interpersonal relationships with students. They tried to perceive the relationship through the eyes of the teacher and they tried to separate their own feelings, attitudes and values from those perceptions. Finally, they attempted to communicate their own personal understanding of what the teacher was communicating in an open and honest way. The operation of

relating to the H. E. L. P. Teachers in such a manner was used in both group and individual training sessions, and most important was used in a continuous manner in the Project.

The value of continuous, systematic contact with consultants must be examined at this time. Again, using as a model the desired relationship between student and teacher, it is also essential that this model be followed between consultant-teacher. If the teacher is expected to be able to maintain a relationship in the face of self-defeating behavior on the part of the student, he must experience the essence of the relationship itself. While one-shot consultant formats were used occassionally, their value remained in the area of "change-of-pace" or stimulation, not in the area of internalized growth in managing the relationship. Many times it was necessary for the consultant to examine with a teacher his/her feelings of inadequacy and defeat because of a specific student. Many times it became necessary to examine carefully whether a teacher wanted to continue with a specific student or not. Discussions such as these demand a consultant who has time, special training and willingness to help the Teacher in a supporting way. He can't be the "expert" in this case.

Other Relationships

It is proposed that the same basic relationship format be used in contact with other components involved with the Project. In fact, a more generalized statement of the relationship entoto, and especially in the area of Board, Administration, Public, etc., is: <u>The Consultant should construct the relationship so as to put himself out of business!</u>

Going back to one of the original premises made in this paper, the objective of innovation as a reason for being of State and/or Federally funded projects, then it follows that if the innovation has value and worth it will become part of the school's program. The Project Consultant should encourage more and more responsibility for the training, management and evaluation phases to rest with the school personnel and not with people or agencies imported from outside. The role of the consultant is infusion of new processes for exploration, examination and program change and development. It would be hoped that if the consultant is successful he would no longer be needed and what would be left is the ability of the system to cause itself to promote change, examine programs and institute and select ways and means of accomplishing desired objectives.

To accomplish this objective the consultant must focus on process rather than content. That is, he must help systems analyze, establish objectives, set up programs and evaluate results rather than only provide information about the problem. What is needed in human enterprise systems is the creation of on-going vehicles which constantly promote the examination of existing structures. A close analogy in the industrial complex is the research and development groups found in progressive and vibrant companies. The behavioral science systems have been slow to adopt this concept and within these systems very little money is allocated to the vital task of evaluating processes and outcomes. Too often the educational enterprise

is viewed as a "close ended" system or a static system. Innovation and the promotion of change is left to teachers and administrators who cannot devote enough time to the process to make it effective. The role proposed for the consultant is one of creating need and demonstrating that educational progress can be made by systematic and well managed approaches.

Again, if the consultant perceives his role in this way more than likely he will be in role conflict with other project relationships. Other elements of the school system hold expectations for the consultant dependent upon their point of view and their position within the social system. The consultant must be able to interprete the objectives of the project to the school staff and must also keep the total objectives of the school in mind. The unique role of providing mediating services to assist in the unfreezing process for differing sets of expectations is vital to a successful program.

In summary, it is hypothesized that the extent to which the consultant is able to establish the same basic helping relationship with project staff members as he desires the staff to have with the clientele will determine the degree of success of the project. Today the consultant is more of an expert on the process of change, of modifying attitudes and assisting in effective behavioral changes than an expert on content. Information regarding content can be achieved by more effective means i.e. textbooks, programmed instruction and audio and visual media. If the consultant relegates his role to information dispensing he will miss his opportunity to perform his unique function.